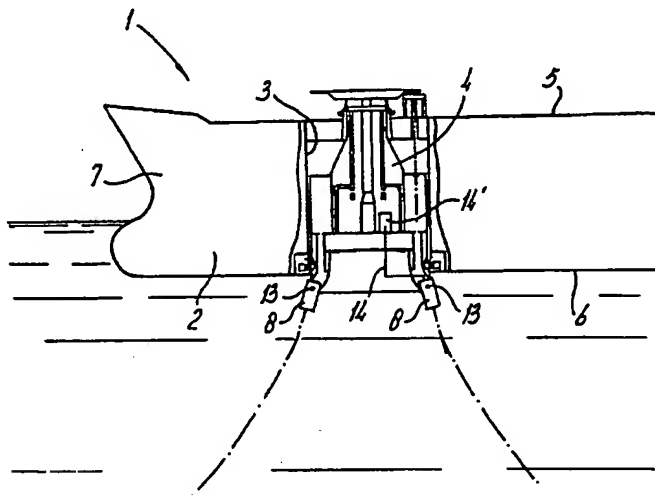




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(54) **BATEAU MUNI D'UN DISPOSITIF DE DESACCOUPLAGE
RAPIDE ET UTILISATION DE CE DERNIER**
(54) **VESSEL HAVING QUICK DISCONNECT MEANS, AND
DISCONNECT MEANS FOR USE IN SUCH A VESSEL**



(57) Bateau comprenant au moins une ligne d'ancrage (15) à laquelle est fixé un dispositif de désaccouplage destiné à libérer le bateau du fond marin. Une première partie du dispositif de désaccouplage (16) est directement fixée au bateau et une deuxième partie, à la ligne d'ancrage (17). Si l'on détache les lignes d'ancrage du bateau, aucun câble ne se trouvera sous le bateau. Les lignes d'ancrage ne risqueront donc pas de gêner le bateau lui-même ni d'autres bateaux, ni de s'emmêler dans des objets sur le fond marin en eaux peu profondes. On peut, de plus, contrôler directement le dispositif de désaccouplage du bateau et assurer facilement l'inspection et l'entretien. Le bateau comprend, de préférence, deux lignes d'ancrage ou plus, chaque ligne étant dotée d'un dispositif de désaccouplage que l'on peut actionner indépendamment. On peut ainsi échelonner le largage des lignes d'ancrage selon les conditions météorologiques ou à l'approche d'objets comme des icebergs.

(57) The invention relates to a vessel comprising at least one anchor line (15). Disconnect means are attached to the anchor line for releasing the vessel from the sea bed. A first part of the disconnect means (16) is directly attached to the vessel and a second part is attached to the anchor line (17). Upon detaching the anchor lines from the vessel, no cables will protrude from underneath the vessel after disconnecting. Thereby the risk of interference of the anchor lines with the vessel itself, with other vessels or with objects on the seabed in shallow waters is avoided. Furthermore can the disconnect means according to the invention be directly controlled from the vessel. Also can inspection and maintenance be easily performed. Preferably the vessel comprises two or more anchor lines, each anchor line having a disconnect means which can be independently operated. Thereby a staged release of the anchor lines is possible which may be adapted to weather conditions or approaching objects such as icebergs.



ABSTRACT

The invention relates to a vessel comprising at least one anchor line (15). Disconnect means are attached to the anchor line for releasing the vessel from the sea bed. A first part of the disconnect means (16) is directly attached to the vessel and a second part is attached to the anchor line (17). Upon detaching the anchor lines from the vessel, no cables will protrude from underneath the vessel after disconnecting. Thereby the risk of interference of the anchor lines with the vessel itself, with other vessels or with objects on the seabed in shallow waters is avoided. Furthermore can the disconnect means according to the invention be directly controlled from the vessel. Also can inspection and maintenance be easily performed.

Preferably the vessel comprises two or more anchor lines, each anchor line having a disconnect means which can be independently operated. Thereby a staged release of the anchor lines is possible which may be adapted to weather conditions or approaching objects such as icebergs.

Vessel having quick disconnect means, and disconnect means for use in a such a vessel.

5 The invention relates to a vessel comprising at least ne anchor line for connecting the vessel to a sea bed and disconnect means releasably attaching the anchor line to the vessel.

10 In the offshore technology, floating production, storage and offloading vessels, drilling rigs or barges, are often anchored to the seabed by means of catenary anchor lines or anchor chains. From a subsea structure, such as an oil well, flexible risers may be attached to the vessel or to the rig, for instance via a turret around which the vessel or rig can weathervane. In case of emergencies or high seas and strong winds, the known disconnect means can be actuated by means of a radio
15 signal from the vessel, acoustically or electrically through a cable connection, such that for instance an hydraulic actuating mechanism detaches the first and second halves of the disconnect means. Rig anchor release units of the above type are for instance available from InterOcean systems inc, San Diego.

20 The known disconnect means have as a disadvantage that they are located relatively far below the water surface, such that they cannot be easily inspected for maintenance purposes. Furthermore, after disconnecting the parts of the disconnect means, the part that is attached to the vessel by an anchor line may cause problems in shallow waters or may interfere with risers around the drilling well or other
25 objects on the sea bed.

It is an object of the present invention to provide a vessel with a quick disconnect means which can be actuated in a rapid and reliable manner, which can be easily inspected and which can be easily actuated. It is a further object of the invention, to provide a vessel which can
30 be disconnected from its anchor lines in a controlled manner.

Thereeto a vessel according to the present invention is characterised in that the disconnect means comprises a first part attached to the vessel and a second part attached to the anchor line.

35 By placing the disconnect means directly on the vessel, instead of at some distance along the anchor lines, no cables will protrude from underneath the vessel after disconnecting. Thereby the risk of interference of the anchor lines with the vessel itself, with other vessels, or with bjects on the s abed in shallow waters, is avoided.

Furthermore, the disconnect means according to the invention can be directly controlled from the vessel by means of a cable connection, such as by a hydraulic or electrical control signal or by mechanical control. Also can inspection and maintenance be easily performed. This is of particular importance when the vessel is operated in for instance arctic waters.

Preferably the first part comprises a hollow housing which is attached to the vessel near keel level, the second part comprising a plug which is attached to the anchor line and which can be inserted into the housing, the plug being on an external surface provided with first coupling means for engaging second coupling means on an internal coupling surface of the housing, the distance between the first coupling means and the second coupling means being variable, wherein the housing at its side facing the vessel, is provided with an opening via which the anchor line passes into the vessel.

One embodiment of a vessel according to the invention is characterised in that each anchor line or group of anchor lines comprises a respective, independently operatable disconnect means.

By being able to release each anchor line, or group of anchor lines, independently, it is possible to detach the vessel from the sea floor in stages. This allows the vessel position to be optimised in case of high seas or during storm conditions. A staged release of the anchor lines is also important in case an object, such as an ice berg, is observed which may collide with the vessel. At a first distance of the object from the vessel, a number of anchor lines may be disconnected as a precaution. When the object approaches further, the anchor lines are released successively until the vessel is able to move out of the path of the object.

It is noted that from US-A-4,604,961 a mooring buoy is known which can be releasably attached to a tanker for hydrocarbons. The buoy is attached to the seabed by a number of catenary mooring lines. A flexible riser is connected to the mooring buoy. When the mooring buoy is released from the vessel, the anchor lines are all disconnected at once. Also is the riser disconnected when the mooring buoy is released. No controlled release of the anchor lines is possible. Furthermore, the anchor lines terminate at the mooring buoy, and do not enter into the vessel via the disconnect means such that the tension on the anchor chains cannot be adjusted, for instance by a winch on the vessel.

The term "anchor lines" as used herein is intended to comprise anchor cables, ropes or chains.

The term "vessel" as used herein is intended to comprise floating structures, such as tankers, barges, rigs, weathervaning structures, mooring buoys etc.

The disconnect means according to the invention can be applied to a large number of different vessels that can be moored to many different types of mooring structures. The disconnect means can be used on weathervaning vessels, on stationary rigs, in a single anchor line mooring, in spread moorings, for mooring a vessel directly to the seabed, to a mooring buoy, to a subsea structure, and the like.

Preferably, the disconnect means are hingingly attached to the vessel, such that the disconnect means can follow the movement of the vessel with respect to the anchor lines, and the stress on the disconnect means remains low.

In an embodiment of the vessel according to the invention, the vessel comprises a turret well extending from a deck level of the vessel to a keel level below the water line. A rotatable turret is mounted in said turret well. The first part of the disconnect means is connected to the turret near keel level. The vessel is connected to a subsea structure via a conduit that is disconnectably attached to the turret. The release means of the anchor lines can be actuated independently from the connection of the conduit. Hereby the flow of hydrocarbons to the vessel can be maintained, while one or more anchor lines are disconnected. It is also possible to flush the conduit, and subsequently release the conduit from the vessel while the vessel remains attached to the anchor lines.

In another embodiment of a vessel according to the invention, the disconnect means comprise a hollow sleeve attached to the vessel. The anchor line is connected near the vessel to a plug member which on an external surface is provided with projections or indentations engaging with coupling means on an internal coupling surface of the sleeve.

The plug member may be hollow such that the anchor lines can pass through the plug member to a winch on the vessel. Hereby the anchor lines can be tightened, for instance after a period of settling. When the anchor lines are formed by chains, the hollow plug member preferably comprises a chain stopper.

The plug member may also be solid and form the end part of the

anchor lines. An embodiment of such a plug member comprises a conical front part having a locking shoulder and a lower positioning edge. The plug member comprises at least one locking pawl, preferably four locking pawls, which is engageable with the locking shoulder of the plug member, and a receiving rim for engaging with the positioning edge to prevent movement of the plug member towards the vessel. By means of the hydraulically operated locking pawls, reliable positioning and a strong connection can be achieved.

Embodiments of the disconnect means according to the invention will be described in detail with reference to the accompanying drawings. In the drawings:

Figure 1 shows a schematic, partly cross sectional view of a vessel comprising a detachable riser buoy and disconnect means in a disconnected state,

Figure 2 shows an embodiment of disconnect means attached to the anchor chains of the vessel, comprising a chain stopper,

Figure 3 shows a top view of the chain stopper of figure 2, and

Figures 4 and 5 respectively show a side view of the disconnect means having four hydraulically actuated locking pawls in a connected and in a disconnected position.

In figure 1 a vessel 1 is shown which near its bow 7 is provided with a turret well 3. The turret well 3 is formed by a cylindrical opening in the hull extending from deck level 5 to keel level 6 below the water line. In the turret well 3, a geostationary turret 4 is mounted such that the vessel 1 can weathervane around the turret 4. Flexible risers 10 from an oil well in the sea bed, are supported by submerged buoys 12, and are connected to a riser supporting buoy 9. The riser supporting buoy 9, which in figure 1 is shown in the decoupled position, is releasably attached to the lower end of the turret 4. The vessel 1 is anchored to the sea bed by means of anchor lines 11 which comprise at their free ends a second part 8' of a disconnect means which releasably engages with a first part 8 of the disconnect means that is attached to the bottom of the turret 4. In figure 1, the parts 8 and 8' of the disconnect means are decoupled, such that the anchor lines 11 are located on the seabed.

The first parts 8 of the disconnect means are hingingly attached to the bottom of the turret 4, in hinge points 13. The first parts 8 comprise a sleeve in which the plug 8' at the free end of the anchor

lines 11 can be inserted. The outer surface of the plug 8' comprises coupling means, such as a number of teeth or projections, which can engage with the teeth or projections on the inner surface of sleeve 8. The projections of the sleeve 8 may be mechanically, hydraulically or electrically movable between an coupling position and a decoupling position. A release control means 14, such as an electrical cable or an hydraulic line, is connected to the sleeve 8 and is on the other side connected to a control unit 14' on the vessel for activating the disconnect means 8,8'.

In figure 2 a disconnect means is shown wherein the first part comprises a sleeve, or "hawser house" 16 and the second part of the disconnect means comprises a hollow plug member 17. The plug member 17 has an internal tapering wall 18 and is on an external surface provided with teeth 19. A chain 15 is guided through the hollow plug member 18 to a winch on the vessel, which is not shown in the figure. A chain stopper 21 is connected to the plug member 17 and has a stopper plate 22. The stopper plate 22 is hingingly attached to the plug member 17 in hinge points 23, 23' as can be seen in figure 3, and covers the opening of the plug member. A cable 24 is connected to the stopper plate 22, such that by pulling the cable 24, the stopper plate can be hinged into a position substantially along the length direction of the chain. When the stopper plate 22 is lifted from the plug member 17, the chain 15 can be let out in the direction of the arrow A. When the chain 15 is pulled towards the vessel, the stopper plate 22 allows the chain elements that are located parallel to the slit 25 in the plate to pass. The chain elements that are perpendicular to the slit 25, will be able to be pulled towards the vessel by hinging the plate 22 upwardly around hinge points 23. Movement of the anchor chain 15 away from the vessel is blocked by the plate 22.

Figures 4 and 5 show an embodiment of a disconnect means wherein the first part comprises a generally ring-shaped housing 30, comprising four hydraulic cylinders 34,35. The housing 30 is hingingly attached to the vessel, preferably to the bottom of the turret 4, via bushings, that are not shown in the drawing. Each hydraulic cylinder 34,35 is at its end attached to a locking pawl 38,39 which engage with the plug 31. The plug 31 carries at its lower end an anchor line and is inserted into the housing 30 in the direction of the arrow C.

As can be seen in figures 4 and 5, the plug 31 comprises a conical front part 40 having a locking shoulder 41. A lower positioning

edge 42 can engage with a rounded shoulder 43 of the housing 30. The locking pawl 39 can engage the locking shoulder 41 by being displaced in a direction transverse to the centre line of the plug 31. Upon insertion of the plug 31 into the housing 30, the positioning edge 42 abuts
5 against the rounded shoulder 43 to prevent further movement of the plug 31 towards the vessel. A plurality of ring shaped housings may be distributed on the vessel, such as for instance sixteen or twenty housings, in a circular configuration along the bottom of the turret.

Claims

1. Vessel comprising at least one anchor line for connecting the vessel to a sea bed and disconnect means releasably attaching the anchor
5 line to the vessel, characterised in that the disconnect means comprises a first part attached to the vessel near keel level and a second part attached to the anchor line.
2. Vessel comprising at least two anchor lines or groups of anchor
10 lines, for connecting the vessel to a sea bed and disconnect means releasably attaching the anchor lines to the vessel, the disconnect means comprising a first part attached to the vessel and a second part attached to the anchor lines, the first part of the disconnect means
15 being directly attached to the vessel near keel level, characterised in that each anchor line, or group of anchor lines comprises a respective, independently operatable disconnect means.
3. Vessel according to claim 2, wherein the disconnect means
20 comprise a hollow housing attached to the vessel, and a plug connected to the anchor line, which plug on an external surface is provided with first coupling means for engaging with second coupling means on an internal coupling surface of the housing, the distance between the
25 first and second coupling means being variable, the housing being at its side facing the vessel provided with an opening via which the anchor line passes into the vessel.
4. Vessel according to claim 1, 2 or 3, characterised in that a
30 release control means is on one side attached to the disconnect means and on the other side to a control unit on the vessel, for releasing the first and second parts.
5. Vessel according to claim 1, 2, 3 or 4, wherein the disconnect
means are hingingly attached to the vessel.
- 35 6. Vessel according to any of the previous claims, comprising a turret well extending from a deck level of the vessel to a keel level below the water line, a rotatable turret being mounted in said turret well, the first part of the disconnect means being connected to the

turret near keel level, the turret being connected to a subsea structure via a disconnectable conduit, wherein the disconnect means can be actuated independently from the connection of the conduit.

5 7. Vessel according to any of the previous claims, wherein the disconnect means comprise an hydraulic actuating mechanism for releasing the first and second parts.

10 8. Vessel according to any of the previous claims, wherein the plug comprises a hollow member, an anchor line running through said hollow member and being connected to a winch on the vessel.

15 9. Vessel according to claim 8, the hollow plug member comprising a blocking mechanism allowing movement of the anchor line through the hollow plug member towards the vessel and blocking movement of the anchor line away from the vessel.

20 10. Vessel according to claim 9, wherein the anchor line comprises a chain, the blocking mechanism comprising a stopper plate which covers an opening of the hollow plug member and is hingingly attached to the plug member, the stopper plate having a slit through which first elements of the anchor chain can freely pass and by which second elements of the anchor chain, that are oriented substantially transverse to the first elements, are blocked.

25 11. Vessel according to any of claims 1 to 7, characterised in that the plug member comprises a conical front part having a locking shoulder and a lower positioning edge, the housing comprising at least one locking pawl which is engageable with the locking shoulder of the front part, and a receiving rim for engaging with the positioning edge to prevent movement of the plug member towards the vessel.

30 12. Disconnect means for use in a vessel according to any of the previous claims, the disconnect means comprising a first part for attaching to a vessel and a second part for attaching to an anchor line, characterised in that the first part comprises a hollow housing which is adapted to be attached to the vessel near keel level, the second part comprising a plug which is adapted to be attached to an anchor line and

which can be inserted into the housing through a receiving opening, the plug being on an external surface provided with first coupling means for engaging second coupling means on an internal coupling surface of the housing, the distance between the first coupling means and the second
5 coupling means being variable by operation of release control means, the housing being at its side opposite the receiving opening provided with an opening via which an anchor line can extend out of the housing.

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fig-1

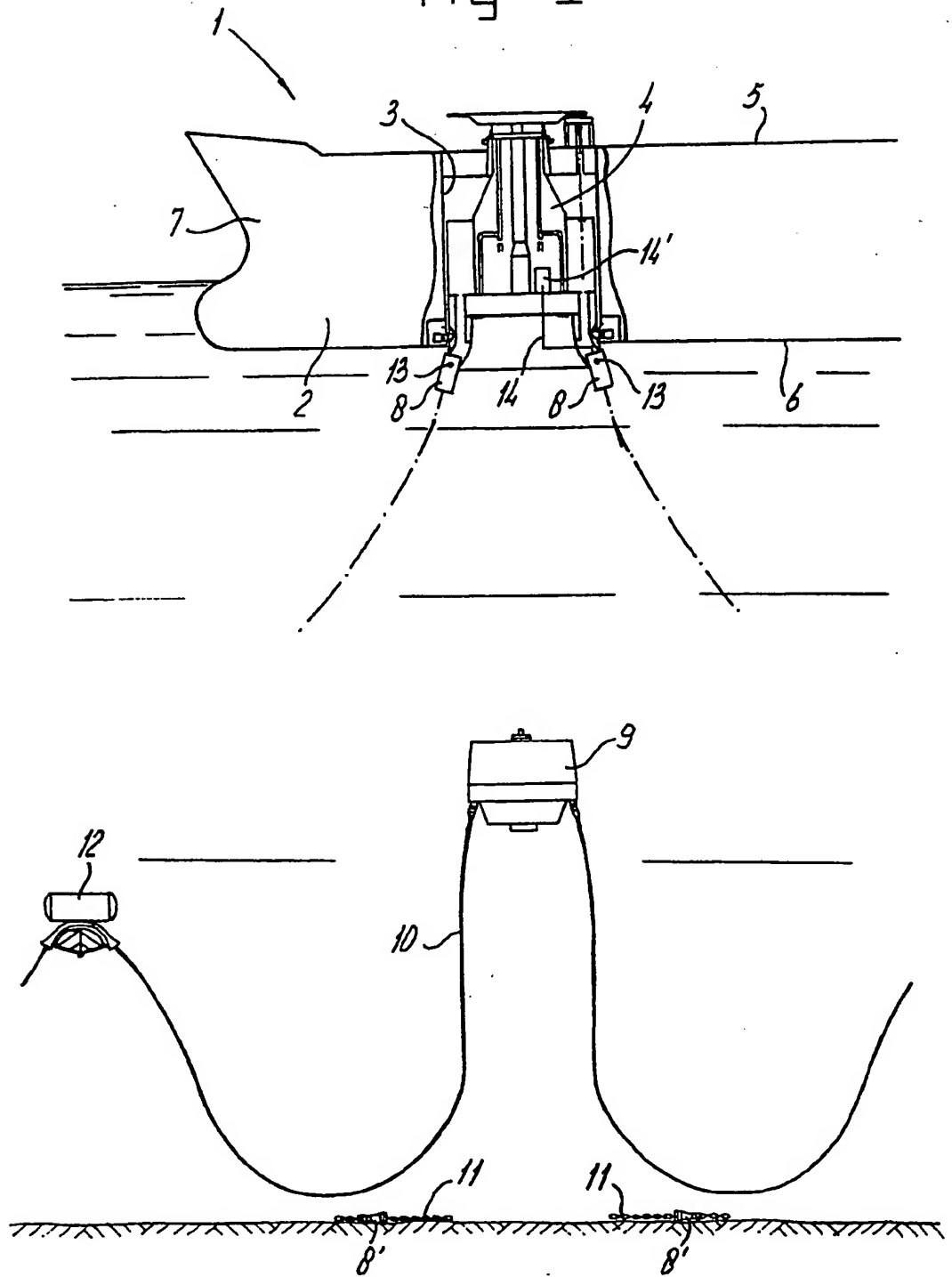


fig-2

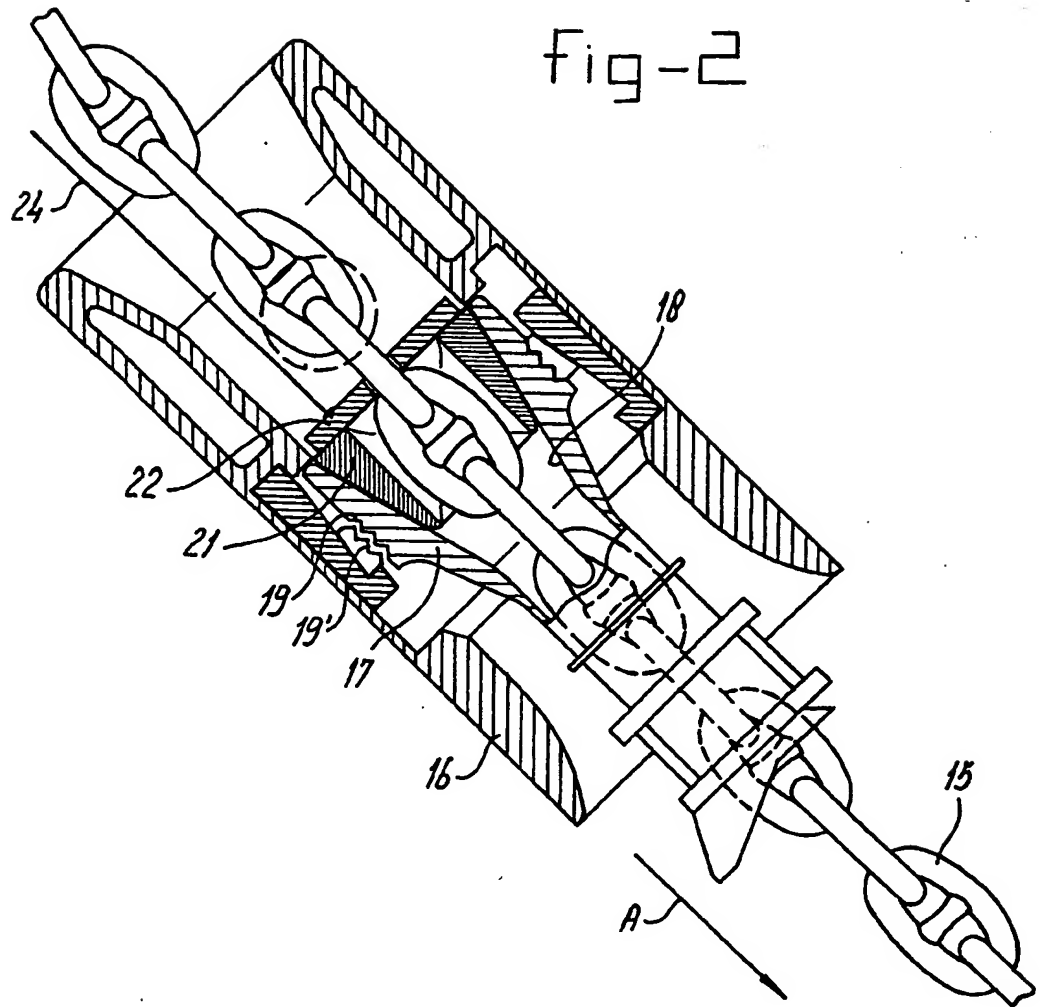


fig-3

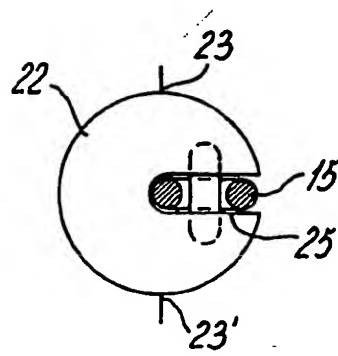


fig-4

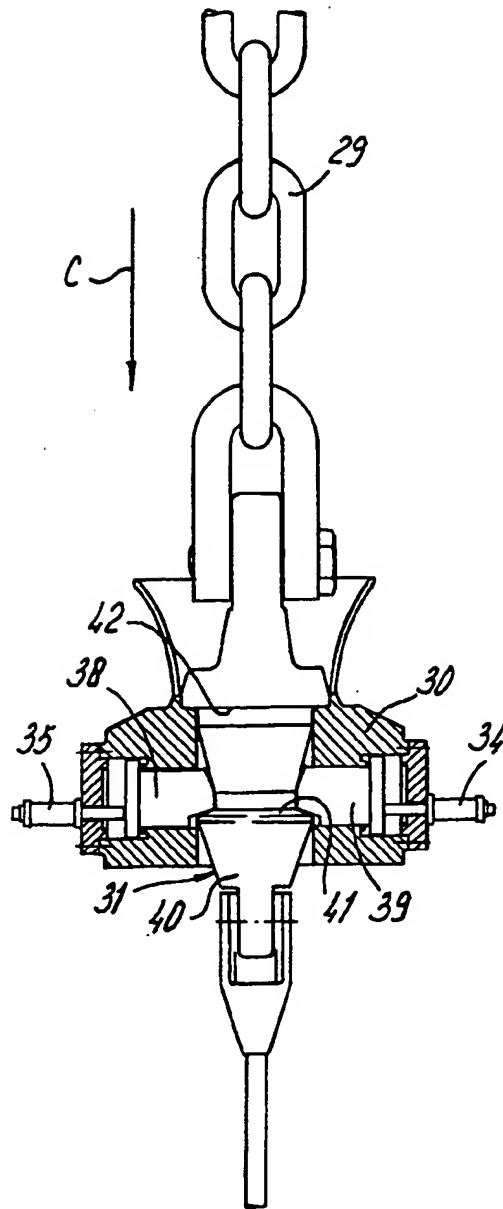


fig-5

